

## MONTANA PRAIRIE DOG WORKING GROUP

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**Meeting Record:** NOVEMBER 1-2, 2006 IN BILLINGS, MT

**Attachments:** CMR-FALL06-Results.pdf  
R6PdogPlan'06Rauscher.pdf  
DNRC103106.pdf

**Attachments to be sent upon request:** Hansen et al 2007.pdf  
Holmes et al 2006.pdf  
FS-NE NF-PDPlan revised.pdf  
Rozol24c Letter to NDA.pdf  
FSA-CRP Producer Letter DRAFT.pdf  
FSA-CRP PD Comments 11-28-06.pdf  
PD Media Messaging hand-outs

**\*\*NEXT MEETING:** TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 2007 IN BILLINGS\*\*

**Participants:** Bobby Baker, John Carlson, Jo Ann Dullum, Lou Hanebury, David Hayes, Pete Husby, Jerry Kaiser, Craig Knowles, Robert Lubbers, Catherine Lynch, Randy Matchett, Larry Murphy, Jay Parks, Dave Pauli, Linda Poole, Allison Puchniak Begley, Ryan Rauscher, Curtis Rides Horse, Jane Roybal, Gayle Sitter, Monty Sullins, John Steuber, Heidi Youmans.

On behalf of the entire Working Group, a BIG thank you to Heidi Youmans for her years of dedication to Prairie Dog Conservation!! Congratulations on your retirement, and we look forward to seeing you in the field.

<b>Agenda Items:</b>	<b>ACTION ITEMS</b>	<b>2</b>
	Updates on Research, Inventory (Tribal, State, Federal).....	2
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**Please note updates/comments** from individuals that were not able to attend the meeting:  
Stephen Dinsmore, Steve Forrest, Marco Restani, Fritz Prellwitz

**ACTION ITEMS STILL TO-DO:**

1. John Carlson will contact project lead to inquire as to how the PDWG can/will interface with the BLM RMP process along the hi-line.
  2. Pete Husby will inquire at NRCS as to the budget breakdown of EQIP and special initiatives (are they included in 'general funds' or set-aside at the beginning?).
  3. Allison Begley will work to include Ted Toombs in our next meeting re: Landowner Incentives and where to go now?
  4. Allison Begley will work to develop a standardized translocation proposal for distribution to those interested (until that time, the WTPD translocation EA is available as a guide).
  5. Allison Begley will contact Kevin Chappell (DNRC) regarding the Agency's policy on PD Control.
  6. John Carlson will provide information to the group on the current extent of sod busting or native grassland conversion.
  7. Heidi Youmans and/or Allison Begley will follow-up with FWP legal on the potential to translocate urban PDs to a Reservation under new Translocation Protocol.
  8. The Translocation sub-committee (with the additions of Cat Lynch, Robert Lubbers and Lou Hanebury) will work with Monty Sullins on urban PD issues.
  9. Jane Roybal will contact Federal Aid regarding the Tribal Options under the new SWG guidelines.
  10. Allison Begley will coordinate a conference call of the Education sub-committee to discuss a game plan or next steps.
  11. Allison Begley and Bobby Baker will look into inviting Lance Vermiere (a rangeland ecologist) to our next meeting as per a request from the previous meeting.
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**UPDATES**

**JO ANN DULLUM (CMR-USFWS):** CMR is enforcing its policy for no off road travel with ATVs, and this has impacted their ability to map PD colonies. Jo Ann has been visually inspecting colonies in the area; will be visiting Garfield County in the upcoming weeks.

- The Veseth easement was impacted by plague (down to 300 ac). No translocation plans until the R6 Implementation Committee is formed. CMR was going to try to burn grasses in the area, but the weather wouldn't cooperate.
- All of the 2004 release sites (translocation) are active and successful.
- No plague epizootics observed on CMR to date.

**LOU HANEbury (USFWS):** FWS undergoing a 5-year review of BFF

- FWS received a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request on WTPD files, and FWS is anticipating a Notice of Intent to sue regarding the 90-day finding of not warranted.

Investigation into Julie MacDonald regarding recent FWS listing decisions (. Will expect to be re-visiting the 90-day finding for WTPD.

- Controversy in South Dakota: FWS does support lower limits of PDs in Conata Basin
- BE will likely be de-listed (from ESA) in March 2007.

LINDA POOLE (MATADOR RANCH-TNC): Grassbank continues provide 3500-4000 acres of incentive areas. TNC would be willing to make Grassbank work for R6 objectives.

- Rancher Stewardship Alliance (RSA) is composed of 30 ranch families that have been traveling to other areas where collaborative conservation is working. This has been an opportunity to see how incentives work (versus a regulatory approach).
- Have been working to map PDs on the Matador (1200 ac) and the Grassbank participants
- Have observed some plague on Matador and participants lands
- There are some concerns regarding BLM shift. Landowners have been asked if they would be interested in poisoning. We need to make multi-use work.
- R6 crew is look for BFFs on Matador Ranch.
- ¾ of the translocated towns persist.

ROBERT LUBBERS (YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON): Robert also sits on E Montana Resource Advisory Council for BLM, and notes that PDs haven't been on the radar for some time. This is indicative of a public lack of information. What does the public have to say about these issues?

JANE ROYBAL (USFWS): Tribal programs: Via TLIP and TWG, Northern Cheyenne (NC) is working on a PD program. First step is to identify and prioritize towns on NC (tribally-owned or private leases). They have hired a technician, and are keeping track of towns. Paperwork on grants is being finalized. Lou has been working with the group re: ESA consulting and NEPA. Program should be rolling in 2007.

- Also submitted a TWG for re-introducing BFFs to NC.
- Crow applied for a TLIP with a similar proposal to NC: incentives to maintain or conserve PDs. Now finalizing this grant and working to hire coordinator/biologist.
- BIA was contracted to map 5600ac on NC
- Crow has not been mapped recently. There has been plague in the Leachman area; same area where PDs were translocated from Billings. There have been reports of some shooting in Leachman area (Lou).
- Defenders of Wildlife assisted with printing brochures on incentive programs with contact information. Will update this FY with new information. Defenders have also been contributing via donors to both tribal programs.
- Lou and Jane are also working with NRCS and have developed a Special Initiative. It was submitted to Dave White; DW requested that the SI come from the ground up, instead.

Kudos to Jane for her work with the Tribes to bring in more than \$0.5 million in successful grant applications!!

BOBBY BAKER (BLM - MILES CITY): PD monitoring has been done by CBNG producers around Decker, as required in permits (5 counties, 1496 acres). This has increased from last surveys. There are 36 PD towns total (0.2 – 274 acres). Are also surveying for MOPL, but have not found any. There are 4 active BUOW nests.

- It is not BLM-Miles City policy to poison for PDs, and over time this has reduced the number of requests that we have had for poisoning. For those that do call, we ask if they would like the office to direct shooters to the area. PDs contribute to biodiversity standards - Standards for rangeland health.

- Also working on a land exchange of 20,000 acres along the Tongue River. More calls with requests for exchange. There is great potential here – BLM is often looking for opportunities for block up lands. BNSF railway may also result in changes in the area. With land exchanges, BLM is looking forward to identifying Category 1,2,3 in Region 7...including areas with ACEC nominations. What's driving exchange? Previous field office manager was a proponent, and there is some interest from the public. This BLM office has many isolated properties.
- Please add Rod Heitschmidt from Fort Keogh to the contact list.

JERRY KAISER (BIA): Section 6 (ESA) money went from Ryan Rauscher to Fort Belknap for BFF work

- Northern Cheyenne mapping – 6000 acres currently; there were 14,000 acres before plague hit. NC has not seen plague since 1991. Have been mapping every year for 15 years. There is no tribal resolution in NC for BFFs at this time.
- Plague has decimated the large towns on Crow (2000-3000 acres) recently.
- People's Creek at Fort Belknap was mapped this year (~2900 ac, in progress). BUOW were abundant; there were signs of plague.

JOHN CARLSON (BLM-GLASGOW): Hi-Line area is currently revisiting their RMP; currently, in the public scoping phase. November 11 is the deadline for public scoping – check for updates on Malta Field Office web site (Resource Management Plan). Area has been re-drawn, and does not include Monument. In Havre, the oil & gas process has been suspended until RMP complete (MWF lawsuit).

- How will PDWG interface? *John will check with project lead.*

FRITZ PRELLWITZ (BLM-MALTA): Black-tailed Prairie Dogs: Plague continued to be the major factor in black-tailed prairie dog mortality in and near the 40 Complex in southern Phillips County during 2006. Plague was detected on eleven dog towns previously monitored for black-footed ferret presence (B40, B42, B43, B47, B49, B50, B67, B68, B72, B95 and B185). No dusting was accomplished in 2006 due to the lack of a certified contractor willing to do the work.

- Dean Biggins (USGS) and Phillip Jones (Univ. SD) completed plague and flea studies in 2006 and will not be returning in 2007. Phillip will be completing lab work in 2007 while Dean will be providing conclusions from his study yet this fall. David Jachowski may still be working in Phillips County during 2007, but a lack of ferrets on dog towns in the 40 Complex may force him to work only on the CMR NWR. It appears that dog towns in the 40 Complex may still provide a site for plague studies in order to learn more about the disease, but it no longer shows potential for building a viable breeding population of black-footed ferrets.

STEVE FORREST (WWF): WWF is looking forward to working with the R6 Implementation Team. WWF will be developing a plague management plan in 2007 for APF lands that will likely involve dusting all or some colonies, and would like advice in terms of acquiring appropriate equipment, stockpiling materials, and permitting;

- APF acquired an additional 308 acres of prairie dog colonies on private and leased lands (total = 650 ac), but lost 84% of its colonies to plague in summer 2006;
- WWF submitted comments strongly opposing plans by the Forest Service to allow poisoning on interior colonies within the South Dakota Conata Basin BFF recovery area.

MARCO RESTANI (ST. CLOUD UNIVERSITY): Please see two interesting papers on plague in Montana. **Available as PDFs** (Hansen et al 2007.pdf; Holmes et al 2006.pdf).

Hansen, D.A., H.B. Britten, M. Restani, and L.R. Washburn (2007). High prevalence of *Yersinia pestis* in black-tailed prairie dog colonies during an apparent enzootic phase of sylvatic plague. *Conservation Genetics*, *in press*.

Holmes, B.E., K.R. Foresman, and M.R. Matchett (2006). No evidence of persistent *Yersinia pestis* infection at prairie dog colonies in North-Central Montana. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 42(1): 164-169.

STEPHEN DINSMORE (IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY): The 2006 field season extended from 15 May through 28 July. I was there through 21 June while my graduate student, Paul Skrade, was there for the entire period. We monitored 128 nests during the 2005 season. The first nest hatched on 1 June, which is near the long-term average. Hatching success was 59% (74 out of 124 nests of known fate hatched; 42 were depredated, 8 were abandoned, and 4 suffered an unknown fate).

- We color-banded a total of 201 plovers (62 adults and 139 juveniles) in 2006. All of the adults were captured with a walk-in trap placed over the nest and all of the juveniles were banded as flightless chicks within a few days of fledging. We also recorded resightings of >90 plovers that had been banded in a previous year.
- Following the dusting efforts in 2004 and 2005, I once again monitored plover nesting activity in the 40 Complex (Table 1). The table illustrates that colony-specific nesting effort and success were highly variable within and between years. As noted previously, nesting success appeared to be much greater on non-dusted colonies than on dusted colonies during all years of study, although the sample of nests on non-dusted colonies was very low in 2006. Note, however, that estimates of hatching (apparent) nesting success are known to be biased, that these are based on very small samples of nests, and that the sample of experimental colonies was small and may not be representative of plover nesting habitat.

Table 1. Summary of nesting by Mountain Plovers in the 40-Complex, 2004-2005.

	2004		2005		2006	
	Nests	<sup>1</sup> Success (%)	Nests	<sup>1</sup> Success (%)	Nests	<sup>1</sup> Success (%)
<i>Dusted</i>						
B-041	5	0%	12	8%	17	6%
B-045	6	50%	4	25%	2	100%
B-069	11	18%	4	0%	11	60%
Total	22	23%	20	10%	30	30%
<i>Not dusted</i>						
B-042	2	50%	7	100%	4	75%
B-043	1	0%	1	0%	0	NA
B-047	1	100%	4	50%	0	NA
<sup>2</sup> B-072	17	59%	10	56%	1	NA
Total	21	57%	22	67%	5	75%

<sup>1</sup>Totals reflect only nests for which the fate was known.

<sup>2</sup>Totals include only nests on B-072 and not nests on the south portion which was formerly B-148.

### **CONTROL USING PESTICIDES:**

**MONTY SULLINS (MDA):** Control with toxicants has not increased or decreased in recent times. Expansion is often expressed. There have been more new areas than an increase in numbers, which is typical of drought...but there is no indication of more control.

- Four states have applied for a new toxicant (Rozol, anti-coagulant) to control PDs. It appears to be more expensive and labor-intensive. If it worked, it would have to be approved by several agencies. Montana (MDA) is NOT currently exploring this option, as there is no efficacy data to support that it's any better than zinc phosphide; supporters believe that there is better consumption by PDs. MDA would only register with the data. Company is aggressively seeking approval. There are currently investigations into the secondary poisoning; canine/feline susceptibility and concerns with raptors. It has been approved/explored in KS, NE, WY, CO.

- Note from Lou Hanebury: FWS does have concerns about efficacy and secondary poisoning.

**FOLLOW-UP 12-05-06:** Lou provided a great deal of information on the various control pesticides. A letter from the FWS with their position on Rozol is **available upon request as a PDF** (Rozol24c Letter to NDA.pdf). Allison can also forward additional information on the topic if you are interested.

**GAYLE SITTER (BLM):** BLM has received repeated requests for control on PD towns on BLM lands in SD. But all would happen under site-specific EA. Nothing has happened yet on Monument – where there is shared ownership by BLM and private landowners. Would only look at specific towns.

**CRAIG KNOWLES (FAUNAWEST):** Have been mapping in ND; follow-up from 2002 mapping

- Approximately half the towns have been poisoned, including the largest town (450 ac); there has been 50-70% growth in areas that weren't poisoned (due to drought); has resulted in some loss of distribution.
- Appears to be one fellow from NE doing most of the poisoning; 80-90% of PDs killed where poisoned; some ranchers are doing their own poisoning.
- Ramik Green (pellet, anticoagulant) is not intended for broadcast application and is not licensed for PDs; has variable results; Product label available at (<http://www.hacco.com/Spec%20Label%20pdf/RamikGreen.pdf> )
- Learned that some ranchers in SD are still using strychnine
- USFS in the Little Mo. Grasslands are planning to poison this fall as a 'good neighbor' policy. It is being done under a research, experimental policy...it hasn't gone through NEPA or public comment. Craig has the proposed action plan.

### **WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG TRANSLOCATION**

JAY PARKS (BLM-BILLINGS): Have been working with Allison, Heidi (with guidance from Jo Ann) on the WTPD translocation protocol. There are some lessons to be learned. The process was do-able, but was extremely cumbersome. We had many of the landowner letters returned (return to sender).

ALLISON PUCHNIAK BEGLEY (FWP): We completed the EA for the WTPD translocation in June 2006 ([http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice\\_1131.aspx](http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1131.aspx); [http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice\\_1099.aspx](http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1099.aspx) ). We found that we had more success in contacting landowners by working with the Carbon County Clerk and Recorder. We had very few comments from the public (8 individuals). Our timeline was a bit off...we hadn't taken into consideration the 30-day appeal period that is part of Translocation Protocol (and standard for BLM). Once we were 'ready' for on-the-ground translocation, with Eric Atkinson's assistance, we were monitoring the towns for plague as per Protocol. Activity levels were quite low on proposed towns (WTPDs start to estivate by July; [http://fwp.mt.gov/fieldguide/detail\\_AMAFB06020.aspx](http://fwp.mt.gov/fieldguide/detail_AMAFB06020.aspx) ), temperatures were very high, and Eric discovered several WTPD carcasses. 2 carcasses were sent to the FWP lab: x-rays indicated that the WTPDs had not been shot (no lead, no broken bones). Tissue samples were sent to CDC to be tested for plague, and came back negative. As the carcasses were several days old when discovered, the only tests that could be conducted were for plague and shooting activity.

• With the discovery of the carcasses (and the inactivity at the sites), we chose to delay the translocation. September was an option, but wet weather made access a problem. The highway construction has been delayed until Spring 2007, and contractors are required to avoid the WTPD sending areas until July 1, 2007. This will give us one more option to translocate the WTPDs before the highway is expanded. We will monitor the towns for activity and health prior to translocation, but have eliminated plague and shooting as a concern (at least to date). We will continue to follow the Translocation Protocol.

- Note from Heidi Youmans (FWP): Commission wanted landowners to be contacted with a good faith effort – that is certified mail.

## **HB492: DUAL STATUS OF PD:**

### **HEIDI YOUMANS (FWP):**

- This 2001 bill paved the way for development of PD conservation such as the shooting regulations
- We are requesting the removal of the sunset clause (Oct 2007)
- Do not expect this to be a controversial issue.
- The dual status is supported by ag interests in order to avert listing, and is needed to reflect PD's ecological status while affirming the prerogative of the private landowner.
- Any regulations require the 'in need of management' status
- FWP has demonstrated that it can handle the authority of 'in need of management' status – we shouldn't fear the repeal.
- Sunsets are common – it improves the comfort level of the legislators.
- Director's Office is pursuing a legislator to carry the bill.

## **FWS COMMENTS ON AGENCY PROGRAMS AND PDS:**

### **LOU HANEURY (FWS):**

#### **DNRC:**

- There were concerns about PDs around Indian Hills and Rehberg Estates in Billings
- FWS sent a letter under informal consultation advising management options, including translocations. FWS does not frequently do informal consultation with DNRC. **Attached as a PDF** (DNRC103106.pdf)
- What is DNRC policy? Lessee is required to control pests, especially if decreasing property value. **Allison will contact Kevin Chappell for follow-up and/or confirmation.**

#### **CRP (Conservation Reserve Program):**

- Currently FSA is resigning CRP contracts (NRCS works with FSA as technical support)
- FSA is checking contract acres, and have been informing landowners that they must control their prairie dogs if they want to re-sign. Under the contract it is stated that the landowner agrees to control all weeds, insects, pests and undesirables.
- Local FSA contacted federal FSA, and were told that it was not going to be an FSA mandate to control prairie dogs. Local county offices could disregard the need to control.
- Producers receive \$5/ac for maintenance; could be used for control
- Lou worked with Glenn Patrick (FSA) to develop a letter to describe situation, and offer landowners the option of conserving their prairie dogs. In Montana, a producer needs to provide a letter with recommendations from FWS to still get payments without control. FWS wishes to maintain acreage.
- **Letter to FSA, and draft producer letter are available as PDFs (FSA-CRP Producer Letter DRAFT.pdf; FSA-CRP PD Comments 11-28-06.pdf) upon request.**

**FOLLOW-UP 12-08-06:** The Montana Field office would prefer that direction come from FSA concerning the producer's dealings with the local county committee. FWS's FSA liaison in Washington, Dave Walker, is working with the Washington FSA office to send out a national clarification on the CRP-1 Appendix, removing the prairie dog as a consideration in the producers requirements to maintain cover. They are using our letter as a basis for proposed guidance to state FSA offices.

- Most County committees may encourage control.



- CRP is part of the Farm Bill, and several cooperators will be working on development of the new Farm Bill (Audubon, WWF, TNC)
- There is no data to suggest how many PD acres may be on CRP. Linda Poole has seen few PDs in CRP around the Matador. Crested wheatgrass appears to be objectionable to PDs.

#### FSA Organic Farming Program:

- It takes 3 years of no chemicals to qualify as organic. Can they break sod and still qualify?
- Eg. In Blaine Co., there is an area with PD and MOPL (over 1000 ac) to be broken.
- Lou is working on a FWS letter to discourage. Does this not have to meet MEPA?
- Issue about sod busting is larger than PDs.
- Also concerns with development/production of ethanol
- Rather than communications from PDWG, letters from other agencies/organizations would be most appropriate.
- John Carlson will follow up on the extent of sod busting

#### **PD MEDIA MESSAGING:**

DAVE PAULI (HSUS): Brought back some live traps from LA...they are available to borrow.

- Recently attended the National PD Coalition Media Messaging meeting (Sept 9-12, 2006). Attitudes regarding PDs were polled in SD (rural) and CO (urban). Sample 'results' are as follows:

	SD	CO	Overall
Are you concerned with loss of habitat?	63%	49%	
What is a representative animal of the prairies?			
Bison			68%
Prairie Dog			11%
Wolf			6%
Black-footed Ferret			2%
Other			13%
What are prairie dogs? Familiar with...			98%
Observed naturally...			91%
Observed in zoo...			17%
Are PD populations increasing or decreasing?	Similar		
Increasing		30%	
Decreasing		33%	
No change		19%	
Unknown		18%	
Are you in favor of shooting on public lands?	54%	30%	
Are you opposed to poisoning on public lands?	51%	65%	
Is it important to protect PDs?	49%	39%	

- Dave had HAND-OUTs from his meeting; Contact Allison if you would like copies mailed to you.

#### **URBAN PRAIRIE DOGS:**

MONTY SULLINS (MDA):

- In Billings, we are seeing more frequently, subdivisions going into PD habitat (e.g. Wicks and Bench, Rehberg Estates)
- Wildlife concerns are often non-existent in development of subdivisions

- Is translocation a possibility? Often there isn't much lead-time...and we need to move quickly.
  - Could PDs be translocated to the Reservation? Heidi/Allison will check with Legal.
  - Could write a multi-year EA to deal with time issues
  - An alternate would be Food for Ferrets. (although urban PDs aren't ideal).
  - Rarely does there seem to be trouble post-construction...PDs usually disperse.
  - There is a property north of Laurel (Rim Country Land Institute) that might be interested in being a receiving site. (educational)
  - The Translocation sub-committee will work with Monty Sullins on these issues.
    - Will add Cat Lynch, Robert Lubbers, Lou Hanebury
  - Other options could be developed by contacting Colorado
  - What about surcharge for developers?
  - Other places that may experience conflicts: Helena? Malstrom? Miles City? Ulm Pishkun?
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### **BLACK-FOOTED FERRET UPDATE:**

RANDY MATCHETT (CMR-USFWS): See attached update (CMR-FALL06 results.pdf). Plague research continues, and there have been some preliminary analyses that suggest that enzootic plague may play a role because dusting or the vaccine improves BFF survival.

- Using program Mark to assess survival of BFFs
- There are currently 15 animals. We released 18 in 2005 on Valentine, but only 2 currently remain. Holly still has 2 males, and Locke has 12 animals.
- No longer dusting, but continuing to vaccinate (requires 1 booster). Titers after one year were great. So, continuing to monitor twice a year, and continuing to vaccinate.
- CMR has still never experienced epizootic plague.
- Have tried releases again through research, but won't continue to release BFFs if the vaccine doesn't improve survival dramatically. Reintroductions will only continue if there are reasonable expectations of survival.

RYAN RAUSCHER (REGION 6-FWP): FWP received Section 6 monies. Decided to look at the potential for BFFs to be dispersing from release areas. Also looking at extent of plague epizootic in 2006.

- Focusing on 10 locations; Looking at towns >200 acres and complexes >300 ac (<0.5 mile distant). Technicians will survey for 3 nights, before determining no BFFs. Technicians have been on the job 3 weeks, and weather hasn't been cooperating.
- Money also went to Fort Belknap for surveys; here, the last BFF was observed 18 months ago, and the last release was 2003.

*Note:* N. Cheyenne may be able to put in a request for BFFs in March under a Recovery permit

FRITZ PRELLWITZ (BLM-MALTA): Black-footed Ferrets: The 40 Complex in south Phillips County may be down to its last black-footed ferret, or less. Various researchers as well as BLM employees spotlighted periodically throughout the summer with limited success. Plague eliminated most of the dog towns having had ferret reintroductions, and efforts were concentrated on three remaining 40 Complex dog towns (B41, B45 and B69). Females were

observed on B41 and B69 early in the year, with two kits observed later on B41. A male was presumed to be present at some time, but was never observed. The B41 female and kits were last observed in early August and are presumed to be dead. The B69 female was observed a few times in early September, but could not be relocated in late September. B45 had had two litters in 2005, but had no activity in 2006. It is a very small dog town and probably had little potential for supporting ferrets. There may not be any ferrets remaining on the 40 Complex.

- The lawsuit over the prairie dog shooting closure came to an end in early 2006. The decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit was appealed to the Supreme Court, but that petition was denied on 27 February 2006.
- MDFW&P employees are currently spotlighting for ferrets on peripheral dog towns where none were released, in case ferrets may have moved to those dog towns. The Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan was completed early in 2006 and MDFW&P employees will begin working with landowners willing to have prairie dog towns. Plague will no doubt continue to play a role in the success or failure of building a large prairie dog town complex in southern Phillips County. The Malta Field Office of the BLM is currently writing a Resource Management Plan scheduled for completion in late 2009 or early 2010. The 7k ACEC will be revisited and BLM's role in ferret reintroduction programs will probably be redefined.

#### **What is the situation outside MT? (Randy Matchett-CMR-USFWS)**

- Conata Basin still has a healthy population of BFFs (~300-350 animals); BFF monitoring has been abandoned by FS
    - Conata Basin has experienced some plague activity. Have been dusting burrows in the highest densities of BFFs...No plague in Conata Basin proper.
    - SD looking at substantially reducing the PD colonies (from 28,000 ac to 10-12,000 ac), and to slow down re-invasion by PDs on private lands. Intent is to provide more forage for cattle. Apparently the reduction of PDs will only result in the ability to graze an additional 130 cattle. Before they were controlling on buffer strips, but are now looking at reducing core acreages.
      - **FOLLOW-UP 12-05-06:** Jonathan Proctor provided other news releases and Defenders of Wildlife's letter; please let Allison know if you would like to receive these. **The federal register (FS-NE NF PDPlan revised.pdf) is available as a PDF upon request.**
  - Shirley Basin population is doing well on 30,000 ac of WTPDs; may surpass Conata Basin
  - Thunder Basin (WY) release has been delayed with the non-essential, experimental designation delayed
  - Mexico hasn't been surveyed or put in an allocation request because of the drought
  - CO has had a couple litters
  - Lower Brule was a new release under a research permit.
  - There is potential site in KS with a private landowner with 6400 acres of PDs who would like to have BFFs on his ranch. EA will be released next week. However, this has become a legal struggle with KS county enforcing PD control on private land. See news articles c/o Jonathan Proctor (<http://online.hdnews.net/content/news/pdogmeet112906.shtml>) and <http://online.hdnews.net/content/news/pdogs113006.shtml> ) or visit the Hays Daily News (<http://www.hdnews.net/>).
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## **REGION 6 PLANNING UPDATE:**

**RYAN RAUSCHER (REGION 6 –FWP)**

Please see **attached PDF of Ryan's slides** (R6PdogPlanBillings'06Rauscher.pdf)

Plan, EA, and ROD can be found at [http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice\\_1074.aspx](http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1074.aspx)

- In March 2006, we completed the Region 6 PD Plan
- There have been several changes in personnel through this process
- There are many partners and many acknowledgements to those who assisted with completion
- Began with the establishment of the Board to determine the components of the Plan.
  - To produce abundance and distribution standards
  - To identify opportunities and constraints
  - Deliver recommendations
- Key considerations: work collaboratively, work with the willing, make a significant contribution to the state plan, maintain the historical distribution of PDs in R6, acknowledge past commitments, look at diverse mix of incentives
- Members of the Board produced 3 alternatives, plus no action alternative
- The Preferred Alternative was collaboratively developed (refer to table in PDF)
- PD Conservation Resources and Tools include: Rancher Stewardship Alliance, PD mapping, landowner incentive program, development of rodent control districts, publicly funded containment, TNC's Grassbank, CMR grazing leases, conservation easements, habitat suitability models, BLM improvements, BLM containment, Translocation, land exchanges, Key Considerations from the Board, Implementation Committee
- Environmental Assessment was developed to look at the potential impacts of the alternatives (for FWP actions only...). 15 issues were identified in public comment, 26 comments with 150 point to address.
- The Record of Decision was issued 04-17-06
- Acreage Objectives: 30,500 to 41,000 ac
- Distribution Objectives: 1 Category 1, 6-8 Category 2, scattered Category 3
- In implementation, will look at Category 1 first.
- Through a SWG grant, R6 released an RFP for a facilitation of the Implementation plan (organization and field work). Non-federal match included license dollars, and in-kind contributions from WWF. Looking to hire January 1, 2007. The implementation committee will be the first priority.

What will we do in other Regions, now?

- We need to work on improving comfort levels, improving citizen involvement
- Outreach will be important
- Should work with the PR-Education sub-committee

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## **STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS:**

**JEFF HERBERT (FWP):**

- Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFCWS) was completed in October 2005. CFCWS is 700 pages and available online (<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/cfwcs/strategy.html> ).

- This process started about 15 years ago with Teaming With Wildlife; it evolved through CARA, WCRP, and became SWG. This is intended to be a proactive approach to conserve habitat. All states were charged with the development of a comprehensive strategy with acceptance of SWG dollars. All plans were reviewed by FWS. MT's plan has been approved.
- CFWCS is designed to identify species and habitats of highest concern, as well as risks and strategies to address those risks.
- During the planning phase, the required non-federal match was 25% to SWG 75%. Now that we are in the implementation phase (Jan 1, 2007), match will be 50%-50%. The goal is to emphasize and encourage partnerships.
- MT's strategy is broken into 4 elements: Focus Areas (geographic), Community Types, Species, Survey & Inventory (by taxa). Plan is very Comprehensive.
- FWP is responsible for all species, and needs to take responsibility to be more effective.
- FWP developed an Implementation Plan (5-year) to identify more manageable pieces:
  - 16 priority species (includes PDs, MOPL, BUOW)
  - 5 priority inventories
  - 6 priority community types (including wetland, sagebrush, grassland)The priority species were chosen using a variety of criteria, and often were indicator species. More than 60+ partners were involved in the discussion, and the same species often came to top
- Priority Tier I species, inventory, community were identified in scoping sessions with partners...focus areas with identified as being less important.
- Goals are to target the money (~\$1 million/year annually appropriated) as such:
  - 50% habitat
  - 25% species
  - 25% survey & inventory
- Will aim to bundle projects; recommended that cooperators work with local FWP offices to develop proposals. There are opportunities here.
- There are at least 5 PD associated species as Tier 1
- Deadline for collaborative proposals is November 15, 2006

#### **Discussion:**

- Brainstorming ideas for non-federal match: Habitat Montana (would have to meet federal requirements); in-kind services (e.g. volunteer time)
  - E.g. Grizzly bear: donation to the project by FS increased match needed.
  - E.g. Black-backed woodpecker: writing small grant agreements to make match
- What about using lottery funds as a match? (e.g. CO, MO) Already directed to education in MT – can't compete with that.
- Are federal monies through Tribes or Conservation Districts potential match?
- Conservation Easements are possible, but would use up money quickly
- Must be project specific; must be cleanly identified to keep accounting from being a nightmare; looking for biggest bang for the buck; money is tracked very closely and will likely be audited.
- Legislature to request general fund monies to serve as match as a temporary measure; we are looking for more permanent solutions.
- AFA (Application for Federal Aid) process takes time, and does need to be approved by FWS (6 weeks to review); Can be a multi-year approach/AFA

- Money needs to be spent during the grant
- This is not an access program; real successes are habitat projects
- The amount of money MT receives is based on population and size of state.
- This is new funding from Congress for new work.
- Doris Duke Foundation is providing \$\$ for match to NGOs. ( <http://www.ddcf.org/> )
- How small a project is too small? **Follow-up (12-01-06):** Adam Brooks (FWP) reported that the smallest project to date was \$10,000. He also stated that projects that are only a few thousand dollars are probably more work than they are worth...however, check with him before we eliminate possibilities.

Discussion on possibilities for PD Inventory, pilot Landowner Incentives program

How is Tribal Wildlife Grants (TWG) working? (Jane Roybal)

- Has been in place for 3 years, funding has decreased each year
- CSKT has been receiving \$\$, but it is becoming more competitive
- Projects are ranked regionally and then through D.C.
- No match is required for TWG
- TLIP match is 25%
- There is a maximum amount that can go to each tribe
- With new SWG guidelines, what are the Tribal Options?  
Jane will follow up with Federal Aid.

### **PD MONITORING DISCUSSION:**

- Montana has new color photos available from 2005. Don't believe that this will work well in MT. Difficulty is in determining activity. There needs to be groundtruthing.
- What questions are we trying to answer? E.g. what changes in population spark action?
- Review Conservation Plan to find questions/commitment
- It has been 10 years since our last survey...we really need to get out there.
- What are the options to try grid-based sampling, similar to Sage Grouse surveys  
→ Need to discuss with new Biometrician with FWP (Justin Gude)
- We need to assess the methods for inventory. A good pilot project would be to explore methods for inventory.
- Methods conducted in WY are available at <http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/nongame/AnnualCompletionReport/2004Report.pdf>. There are two BTPD reports.
- **See responses from Monitoring/Mapping/Inventory Query below. If you haven't responded to those questions, and do map PDS, please continue to submit feedback.**

### **LANDOWNER INCENTIVE DISCUSSION:**

- Draft Landowner Incentive Program under EQIP was submitted as a Special Initiative to NRCS in December 2005.
- Through Pete Husby, we understand that our proposal wasn't successful and we were encouraged to try to submit one through a local working EQIP group.
- Special Initiatives appear to be quite competitive. Has a limitation of funding been a problem? Or is the EQIP budget already separated into regular programs and SIs? **Pete Husby will follow-up.**
- We are hesitant to draw money away from other programs.

- Jane Roybal has been working with Tribal NRCS group: problem here has been the qualification criteria (earning \$1000 in commodities).
- We should engage Debbie Hohler (FWP/NRCS)
- How has the success been with Sage Grouse? There has been a SI out of Great Falls for protections 2 miles around active leks...maintenance of sagebrush communities. Worked with FWP and BLM. This came from a Field Office with area office support. WY has also had some success with sage grouse.

**Action Items:**

1. Develop a SWG proposal with Linda, Ryan and Allison to explore possibilities for a pilot incentive program

**FOLLOW-UP 11-13-06:** This is an update on the proposal for SWG funding to pilot a landowner incentive program in Region 6. Allison and Linda Poole will not be submitting the proposal at this time. TNC has a very valuable commodity in their Grassbank program to serve as non-federal match, and want to ensure that this match goes to support community-based conservation. Until there is an R6 PD Plan Implementation Committee that could ensure that this proposal would be supported by a wide breadth of stakeholders, we are hesitant to submit a proposal.

2. Engage Ted Toombs, whose had success in other states using a variety of methods. Ask him to attend the next meeting. (Recall attachments from meeting announcement in October 2006).

From our last meeting: \*\*Allison and Heidi will work on developing a 'form' or standardized translocation proposal that addresses content and process (who gets info); and work on FWP inreach\*\*

November 2006: Allison will continue to work on this, and will make the WTPD translocation EA readily available to assist with any developing proposals.

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**WRAP-UP:**

1. At last year's meeting, there was the following request:  
"Can we include a RANGELAND ECOLOGIST in the next meeting?"

Bobby Baker has recommended that we add Lance Vermiere to our contacts list.

2. Allison will continue to develop a list for individuals who would like to receive updates from Dean at USGS. Please send Allison your name if you would like to receive these emails.
3. Allison is continuing to develop a list for individuals who would like to receive mailings from Interstate PD Conservation Team Coordinator. Although there haven't been too many relevant emails recently, I will forward pertinent information. Please send Allison your name if you would like to receive these emails.
4. Education Sub-Committee: What kind of education and outreach are we looking for? This group could work on a powerpoint presentation that could provide baseline information on Prairie Dogs. Allison will coordinate a conference call to discuss.

5. Available Publications: If you would like a copy of any of the publications from the last 2 meetings, please email ([apuchniak@mt.gov](mailto:apuchniak@mt.gov)) or call (406-247-2966) Allison to have them mailed to you.

Gage, K.L. and M.Y. Kosoy. (2005). Natural history of plague: Perspectives from more than a century of research. *Annual Review of Entomology* 50: 505-528.

Hinnebusch, B.J. (2005). The evolution of flea-borne transmission in *Yersinia pestis*. *Current Issues in Molecular Biology* 7: 197-212.

Lorange, E.A., B.L. Race, F. Sebbane, and B.J. Hinnebusch. (2005). Poor vector competence of fleas and the evolution of hypervirulence in *Yersinia pestis*. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 191 (1 June): 1907-1912.

Sidle, J.G., D.H. Johnson, B.R. Euliss, and M. Tooze. (2002). Monitoring black-tailed prairie dog colonies with high-resolution satellite imagery. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 30 (2): 405-411.



FROM: ALLISON PUCHNIAK BEGLEY

DATE: OCTOBER 31, 2006

WHAT IS OUR ABILITY TO DEVELOP A STATEWIDE MONITORING STRATEGY IN THE FORM OF RESOURCES, PERSONNEL AND COMMITMENT?

SUMMARY:

I received six responses from 4 agencies or groups. There appeared to be split support for participation in a statewide effort, and a widespread lack of funding to do so. Participation would be contingent upon an ability to continue current localized efforts, i.e. additional information included in current efforts versus an 'all-new' approach. Budgets (for those that could put a dollar amount on it) varied from \$3.00/ac to \$2000 - \$137,900 (prairie dogs and black-footed ferrets); and the permanency (e.g. one-time grant funds) and source (e.g. agency personnel time) of the funding also varied widely. The majority of respondents felt that there was a need for a statewide database for larger statewide planning efforts.

PROPOSAL:

The number and variety of responses that I received made it difficult to come up with a proposal for statewide monitoring, especially given the budget crunch that all groups are feeling. However, it has been almost 10 years since Montana has completed a statewide inventory. My proposal for 'where to go from here' would be to apply for State Wildlife Grant funding (non-federal match would be a challenge that we will need to tackle) to conduct a statewide inventory. The method that I would propose would parallel the current strategy that Wyoming is using, and I will try to bring more information on this technique to the meeting. Regarding monitoring, the Montana Sage Grouse Working Group is developing a very interesting model for tracking sage grouse trends that we might be able to model to suit PD needs. I will look into having someone speak on this topic at our first meeting in 2007, when the sage grouse monitoring strategy should be complete.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS TO ASSESS OUR ABILITY TO DEVELOP A STATEWIDE MONITORING STRATEGY:

1. Is your agency/organization interested in participating in statewide monitoring and inventory for PDs? Would you be willing to modify your current protocol (if necessary) to mesh with a statewide monitoring scheme?
  - Yes, YES. (Gayle Sitter, BLM)
  - It is unlikely that BIA would participate in a statewide monitoring effort. We will continue to monitor prairie dog towns on Northern Cheyenne, Fort Belknap and Crow. However, since money is tight we will not be doing every reservation, every year. (Jerry Kaiser, BIA)
  - We don't have any resources for statewide monitoring. We will probably only physically monitor in a few selected locations, but will share as acquired. We

occasionally get opportunities for remotely sensed data at reduced cost, but this is iffy. (Steve Forrest, WWF)

- As far as modifying our protocol, it would depend on the amount of modification. We will continue mapping the refuge every 3 years. Any additional requests of the state group will be in addition to our current mapping efforts. As far as attribute information in the GPS, all the past mapping information has been edited to match exactly over the years (including name, id number, column width, decimal points, etc) so our analysis is accurate and easier. The only modification we would be willing to do is to add some fields onto our already existing attributes. This was, we could easily delete these additional items without having to change our information and still run our own analysis. (Jo Ann Dullum, CMR)

- yes, possibly (Bobby Baker, BLM-Miles City)

- The Malta Field Office has expended excessive time and funding for PD monitoring for 25 years, and that effort will probably greatly decline in the next few years. Our office priorities now are oil and gas leasing and development, and writing of the Malta Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP). Priority data gathering and monitoring will be in support of these two efforts. We recently completed a prairie dog town inventory and I don't anticipate doing another one for at least several years. The only exception might be individual grazing allotments on a case by case basis where prairie dogs are causing significant losses in livestock forage and wildlife habitat for other species, and some type of control is being considered. I believe we have been using current protocol in recent years, and would be willing to use the latest techniques when we do conduct some inventory and monitoring. (Fritz Prellwitz, BLM-Malta)

2. What is the current effort that you expend on PD monitoring/mapping/inventory (i.e. total cost \$\$ and/or personnel)?

- Majority of funding is under base funding (i.e. normal work months for biologists, seasonals etc.) Photos or imagery are paid for by major planning efforts. We seldom have add on \$ just for pdog monitoring; however if a statewide effort was developed, we could submit for funding under several budget areas and would have a good chance to fund the inventory. (Gayle Sitter, BLM)

- FY 2006 = \$0; FY 2007(est) = \$2000 (Steve Forrest, WWF)

- Our cost per acre: field time and creating the data profile is \$3.00 per acre. Since fuel prices went up this cost has likely increased. (Jerry Kaiser, BIA)

- CMR current effort = every 3 years all the colonies on CMR (~7000 acres) are mapped by a minimum of 2 people. This takes ~8 weeks x 40 hrs/wk = 320 hrs. Salaries for this total \$30 – 35/hr for 2 people. 320 x 30 = \$9600-\$11,200.

Fuel and mileage (~1500 miles/ 15 mi/gal x \$3/gal = ~\$300) + ATV fuel = ~\$100.  
(CMR owns ATV's, so I did not include the cost of purchasing an ATV).

Total: ~\$10,000-\$11,600 for 2 people (Jo Ann Dullum, CMR)

- Variable, anywhere from 2K to 20K, combination of in-house, contract and cooperator conducted. (Bobby Baker, BLM-Miles City)
- The latest effort was conducted by two BLM Wildlife Biologists and several interns. The cost for ferret/prairie dog projects in 2004 was \$137,900. That does not include salaries for our people. This year I will have no people for PD inventory and monitoring. The only funding we have is in the neighborhood of \$20k for implementation of the Region 6 Prairie Dog Management Plan, but there is to be a rescission of some of that funding to pay for hurricane damage, and we haven't seen the bottom line yet. (Fritz Prellwitz, BLM-Malta)

3. Is this a fixed amount of money? Or do your efforts rely on soft money? What would your agency be willing to dedicate to PD monitoring?

- See above. (Gayle Sitter, BLM)
- Mostly project specific soft money (Steve Forrest, WWF)
- This money is mainly salaries that come from our refuge funds so it is not soft money. I've spoken to our project leader and we will not have money to contribute at this time. We are in a severe budget crunch. However, we may be able to assist in mapping efforts. (Jo Ann Dullum, CMR)
- Not fixed, based on funding requested. We are willing to dedicate efforts for monitoring, subject to other priorities; however, funding may not always be available. With Craig Knowles recent inventory, we would evaluate the need to reinventory areas this recent. (Bobby Baker, BLM-Miles City)
- My salary is fixed money, but the \$20k is soft money. My priorities are oil and gas, and the RMP. I do not know how the \$20k will be spent, other than for any control projects that might be proposed this year. (Fritz Prellwitz, BLM-Malta)

4. Is the centralized database of use to your agency/organization and/or requests made of your agency?

- Yes. BLM has used it frequently at the state level for planning efforts. We need to sell it more at the local level. (Gayle Sitter, BLM)

- Currently all the tribal data is on our GIS system and is capable of being downloaded with maps and associated data e.g. size of towns, locations and total acres. (Jerry Kaiser, BIA) I do not believe that BIA would ever sign up for a centralized data system. (Jerry Kaiser, BIA)
- The centralized database is of great use to us (e.g., ACEC proposal) (Steve Forrest, WWF)
- I have never used the centralized database, however I have access to the prairie dog acreage information I have needed so far. In the future, I may have a use for it. (Jo Ann Dullum, CMR)
- Yes, essential. (Bobby Baker, BLM-Miles City)
- At this point, no. I use the information that our own people collected in 2004-2005 for use in suspending or leasing natural gas, and in stipulating development on existing leases. I am not aware of anyone else gathering inventory data on BLM land in Phillips County that I would need for my current work priorities. (Fritz Prellwitz, BLM-Malta)

**DRAFT**